VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

APRIL 1995 ONE DOLLAR

Striped bass begin their spawning run up the Staunton and Dan Rivers later this month. Turn to page 20 for more on this annual rite of spring for Virginia anglers; photo by Dwight Dyke.

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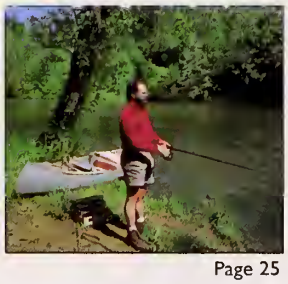

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Back cover: Wild azalea; photo by Bill Lea.

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Dwight Dyke

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

Superflies: Part I

Ten Trout Flies You Can't Live Without

by Harry Murray

Virginia's trout can be fooled all season long by the angler with the right flies in his or her tackle box. Nonetheless, with thousands of trout flies effective in countless situations, making a selection can easily boggle the mind of the beginning angler.

In order to simplify the selection process, it helps to first examine the general preferences exhibited by trout, and then to identify specific fly patterns which historically have proven themselves to be consistent producers under these conditions.

Trout are masters at adapting their feeding behavior to make the most of the natural foods available to them. For example, early in the spring when the streams are flowing at their highest levels, trout often seek the protection of stream-bottom boulders to feed upon the nymphs which hold there. Then, as the aquatic insects begin emerging shortly thereafter, the trout move into an alert visual mode in order to capture them. When the adult insects taxi along stream surfaces, the trout lie in wait on carefully selected feeding stations in order to intercept them. Later, with the approach of summer, our trout are still quite willing to feed upon insects, but now the bill of fare has changed. There are now many more terrestrial insects on our streams than there are aquatic ones.

With this as a reference point of the trout's manner of seasonally feeding on natural insects, let's examine some of the flies which historically have produced well for me as well as for the students in my fly-fishing schools.

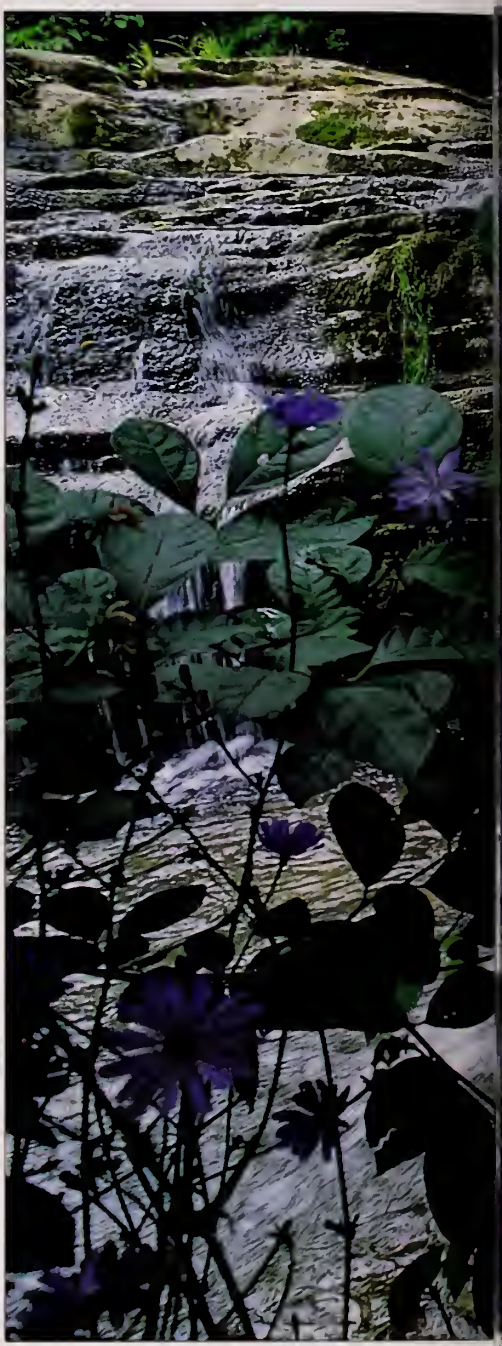
Whitlock's Red Squirrel Nymph just may be the best trout nymph

Whitlock's Red Squirrel Nymph

Mr. Rapidan Emerger

Royal Wulff Dry Fly

***Right:** In Virginia, there are over 2,200 miles of wild trout streams and about 600 miles of stocked waters. That's plenty of water to test your superflies on!*
Trout fly photos by Harry Murray.



I've ever used. Not only does it pass quite well for many mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies, it is tied "in the round" as the late Charlie Brook strongly encouraged. This method of construction permits us to negate the mixed deep currents, allowing the trout to view our nymph in a natural plane. I prefer fishing this nymph upstream in a dead drifting manner, allowing the current to push it back downstream, just as it would a real insect. The nymph is permitted to search out every

Dwight Dyke

crevice along the stream bottom and as the trout picks it up, one is alerted to the "take" by watching the indicators on the leader. (I've used dozens of indicators, but I keep coming back to those made by Scientific Anglers, because of the smooth casting they afford, their high visibility and their adaptability to all nymphing demands.) Sizes 10, 12, and 14 are the most useful sizes.

The **Mr. Rapidan Emerger** is one of the most consistent underwater fly patterns we have. When I developed this fly about 15 years ago, my goal was to produce a pattern which the trout would accept readily when they were feeding on the emerging form of the natural Quill Gordon *(Epeorus pleuralis)* mayflies. This was a worthy goal, for this mayfly is our first large aquatic insect to hatch as the season begins, showing up on many streams as early as mid-March. Additionally, it is one of our densest hatches. For example, late one evening as William Downey and I were hiking out of a remote headwater trout stream after a day of superb fishing, we found ourselves looking westward into the sunset over a deep canyon with the stream far below. The exploding sun's rays boldly illuminated millions of Quill Gordon insects as they vaulted skyward to dive back down to the stream in their beautiful mayfly mating dance. This type of display will quicken the pulse of any angler while at the same time pampering the palate of any trout.

Since these insects, unlike most

others, have their wings fully extended as they head to the stream's surface, the Mr. Rapidan Emerger proved extremely effective early in the season in sizes 10 and 12. An unexpected windfall came our way when we found that going down to a size 14 enabled us to take trout consistently all season long.

The **Royal Wulff Dry Fly** was developed by a very good friend of mine who had a great influence on angling development. The late Dan Bailey concocted this pattern and named it for his friend Lee Wulff. Although it mimics nothing in nature, often prompting jokingly critical comments by more refined angler-entomologists, the Royal Wulff is a great trout catcher. So confident was Dan in its fish-taking powers that as he readied himself for his last trip to New Zealand, he calmly stated: "...think I'll take about six dozen flies this trip, three dozen Royal Wulffs size 12 and three dozen Royal Wulffs size 14." Knowing Dan, he probably did just that.

Although there are numerous theories as to why this pattern is so consistent, I feel much of its success rests in the fact that it floats quite well and is highly visible to the angler. Thus, it is simply used a great deal. I like to carry this in sizes 14, 16, and 18.

The **Mr. Rapidan Dry Fly** came about as I attempted to blend the great floating and highly visible qualities of the former fly with components which would yield a pattern mimicking numerous natural insects. This really has been achieved beyond all expectations. This is my number one choice for all of my dry fly fishing throughout the entire season. In March and April I use it mostly in size 14, for this matches the natural Quill Gordon *(Epeorus pleuralis)* and March Brown *(Stenonema vicarium)* mayflies which hatch at that time. By late April and throughout May I use the size 16 Mr. Rapidan to match the beautiful Little Yellow Stoneflies *(Isoperla bilineata)* which dance so seductively over the stream surfaces. During the summer, the sizes 16 and 18 continue to take fish as the pools become crystal clear. The approach of fall triggers the Little Olive mayflies *(Baetis vagans* and others). Here I drop down to the Mr. Rapidan size 20 parachute and fool these fish regularly.

The **Elk Hair Caddis** as designed by Al Troth is my favorite pattern when real caddisflies are all over the streams. In addition to the trout being quite fond of this fly, it possesses several characteristics which anglers like. When it is tied with light elk hair, it is very easy to see on the water, which obviously helps in strike detection and drag control. Due to its streamlined design, it planes well; that is, it casts quite smoothly, and, with little air resistance, enables us to use a finer leader than would otherwise be possible on the same size fly. This aspect alone, I'm sure, gives me many extra trout over the course of the season.

In addition to the conventional dead-drifting tactic used with most dry flies, this fly permits a slightly different ploy which may mean the difference between a memorable day's fishing and a frustrating nightmare. For instance, a friend called recently with the following dilemma. "I know the trout were feeding on real caddisflies," he said, "because they were all over the water. Some were returning to lay eggs while newly hatched insects were emerging from the stream. I didn't know how to fish because the insects were all buzzing about the stream's surface."

You can imagine my friend's relief when I pointed out that he had answered his own question as to the best angling tactic. That "buzzing" action is what he needed to strive for with his flies. It made no difference which stage of the natural caddisflies the fish were taking.

It goes like this. When a trout is spotted feeding on the naturals, the Elk Hair Caddis is cast about a foot upstream, and by extending the rod up and over the water at about a 45° angle, the fly is skated gently across the surface, and...*crash*! You got him. Our best sizes are 14, 16, and 18. I like to carry some with olive bodies and some with brown bodies.

The **Adams Dry Fly** should be included in our arsenal because it has established the well-deserved reputation as the "fly to use when I don't know what to try." By covering the spectrum with sizes 14 down to 18, one can cover a broad variety of needs. I personally see this coming into its own after the full spring streams have subsided, because its delicate nature seems to fool the fish best later in the season.

Ed Shenk's Cricket is a personal "must" for me. In addition to perfectly replicating this seemingly always present summer insect, it is the best fly I've ever found when a vari-

Mr. Rapidan Dry Fly

Elk Hair Caddis

Adams Dry Fly

Ed Shenk's Cricket

Parachute Black Ant

Black Strymph

Woolly Bugger

***Left:** By tuning into a trout's seasonal food preferences, the fly fisherman can make a good guess at the best flies to use in a particular situation. The author's top ten flies will help you get started.*
Trout fly photos by Harry Murray.

ety of wasp-like insects are around our streams.

As you can see from our list of flies, there are a variety of attributes prompting their inclusion, which in some cases overlap. However, Shenk's Cricket possesses one quality which, to me, is unrivaled. It truly reigns supreme as a fish finder! When it is drifted over a trout which is even just slightly "in a feeding mood," he can seldom resist the temptation to swing up and take a look at it. A high percentage of these trout will readily accept it and you will have your fish. If, however, the trout turns away, returning to his holding position, you have now "found" him. Whereupon you go to your bag of tricks and match wits with him. *Caution:* Don't take it personally if that trout out there with a brain the size of your indicator outsmarts you. He knows his game better than you do.

If I were restricted to only one fly for my summer trouting on our larger, low-gradient streams, it would be Shenk's Cricket. This unshakable confidence is based simply on the fact that it has seldom let me down. This, coupled with the fact that it is a larger fly than I find I can normally use during the summer, leads me to believe that I can take more large trout with it. You know, it's the old "big fish eat big flies" theory. Sizes 12 through 16 are all worth carrying in this pattern, with daily experimentation suggesting the best size.

The **Parachute Black Ant** is my "ace in the hole" for those tough trout who insist on continuing to feed right in front of me while disrespectfully finning their noses at every other fly in my box. Seriously, I have frequently worked over feeding fish for 20 or 30 minutes with a variety of flies, even going down to 8X tippets, and receive only a few "nods" as the late master angler Vince Marinaro called those casual, noncommittal looks by the trout. Switching over to a size 20 Parachute Black Ant brings the long awaited solid and confident take by the trout.

Explanations for this bold, almost greedy, manner of feeding upon ants are diverse, and at their best represent only a speculative stab by man into an underwater environment totally beyond his comprehension. One imaginative (and somewhat researched) theory was promoted by Mr. Ed Hewitt shortly after the turn of the century, when his personal "taste test" (the beginning of the Pepsi commercials?) revealed that ants had a "sweet taste" for the trout. Could be.

In addition to utilizing my smallest Parachute Black Ants on gossamer leaders in an attempt to fool these seemingly mouthless feeders, I will use Ants in sizes 14 and 16 as searching patterns for unseen trout. Since natural ants start showing up on our mountain streams in April, this is a realistic ploy. This, in fact, was what prompted me to put a white parachute wing on my Black Ants many years ago; I just couldn't see those little solid black flecks of feather and fur among all those tossing currents. Here, the tactic calls for searching out every worthy looking feeding station rather than trying to spot an individual trout.

The **Black Strymph** is one of the best minnow imitations we have for Virginia's trout. In fact, if I were restricted to only one streamer-style fly, this would be it. As the name implies, I was striving for a pattern which could be fished as both a streamer (minnow imitation) and a nymph (aquatic insect imitation).

Many anglers go to this fly for much of their large stream trout fishing, feeling that it is an excellent imitation of the real sculpin minnows as well as many other minnows found in our streams. An effective tactic for fishing streamers on large trout streams is to wade downstream, casting down and across stream so the fly can be retrieved with a slow line-hand stripping action along the stream bottom.

In our smaller streams, this ploy would be unproductive, since approaching the trout from upstream would allow them to see us, and scare them before they would even see our flies. A better streamer tactic here is the upstream approach where the fly is cast up and across stream and retrieved back downstream at the same rate as the current.

The **Woolly Bugger** is another popular streamer. Although it has been around for only about 15 years, its use throughout Virginia has spread extensively. Part of this angler appeal, I'm sure, rests in the fact that it has a buggy appearance. It just looks like it should catch fish. Additionally, it is easy to tie, enabling any beginning fly tier to whip out a few and then proudly go catch some trout on his own creation.

As you can see, one does not need an extensive fly collection in order to catch trout consistently throughout Virginia. Rather, a well thought out basic selection, wisely chosen to meet a variety of conditions, will provide you with great action all season long. □

Harry Murray is a freelance writer who teaches fishing and fly tying in Edinburg, Virginia.

Smallmouth bass: photo by M.L. Giovannetti

Lloyd B. Hill

An extensive fly collection is not necessary to catch trout consistently in the Old Dominion. Rather, a basic selection meeting a variety of conditions promises success throughout the entire season.

Superflies: Part 2

The Ten Best Smallmouth Bass Flies

by Harry Murray

Virginia's anglers are very fortunate to have smallmouth bass in so many fine streams. One attribute which ranks this "gentleman of the warmwater species" so high in the esteem of many sportsmen is his willingness to strike flies with gusto.

Admittedly, some flies are more productive under certain circumstances than others. So, in order to have the right flies without being encumbered with dozens of unnecessary patterns, let's approach this like the youngster in a oft-told fishing story did to explain his stringer full of fish to the mature but fishless angler. "Mister," the boy explained, almost apologetically, "I just tried to think like I was a fish."

In order to swing our thinking into this vein, let's look at the natural foods which are available to bass, see how they feed upon them, and finally select fly patterns which will match them. First, we'll investigate the various minnows smallmouths feed upon and discuss five of the best streamers and bucktails which we use to match them. Next, we'll examine some of the underwater forms of the aquatic insects which represent an important part of the bass's diet and reveal three of the nymphs which fill this niche. Finally, we'll cover the smallmouth's surface-feeding whims and show how two well-selected bugs can fool many of these fish.

One of the most important minnows in the smallmouth's diet in Virginia is the chub minnow. This robust, silver-sided minnow holds in surprisingly strong current, and although he is not a true schooling minnow, we often find great concentrations of them throughout our streams.

Shenk's White Streamer is the best chub minnow imitation I've ever used. In fact, I can say without any reservations that this is the most consistently productive smallmouth streamer I've ever found. Not only does it come through regularly for my personal fishing, it always takes fish for the students in my smallmouth fly fishing schools, even when all other streamers fail. This is one fly I would feel lost without on a smallmouth stream.

One of my favorite ways to fish Shenk's White Streamer is to start at

Shenk's White Streamer

Shenk's Black Sculpin

James Wood Bucktail

Waterman's Silver Outcast

Olive Strymph

Murray's Hellgrammite

Dragonfly Nymph

the head of a pool and systematically fish my way downstream, covering every prospective fish-holding pocket as I go. This is a good place to discuss some basic streamer fishing tactics, since they apply to Shenk's White Streamer as well as to the other four streamers we'll discuss.

Normally the streamer is cast down and across stream at a slight angle, the precise spot of presentation determined by evaluating the water downstream. This is important, because the streamer must sink down to the bass's level as it approaches his feeding station. It is imperative to be in control of the entire drift of the fly in order to swim it across and in front of our bass in a realistic manner.

Simply allowing the streamer to sweep past a bass as if were a weight on a pendulum would fool few worthy fish. An effective method is to slowly swing it broadside in front of the quarry so he sees it as a big mouthful of something good to eat and jumps right on it.

Almost invariably, a slow streamer retrieve is more productive than a fast one. This is partly because smallmouth bass just seem to prefer a slow fly action, but primarily because it allows our streamer to ride deeper in the water where the fish are actually holding.

I'm sure that in many runs where the current is moving quite rapidly, our flies simply dash across the stream several feet over bass without them even being aware they are there. Even if they do glimpse them rushing by, they tell themselves that it would take too much effort to chase them down. Are we thinking like a fish now?

Detecting the strike of a bass as he takes a streamer presented down and across stream should and can be an easy task with little forethought, because we can quickly *feel* their takes and instantly set the hook. The problem arises when we allow them enough time to "mouth the fly." Detecting it as a phony, they eject it before we can set the hook. The simplest way to prevent this missed strike is to constantly have a tight line all the way from the line hand down to the fly, so that the instant the bass picks up our fly it is telegraphed back and the hook is quickly set. This is a basic technique to all downstream streamer fishing.

When I was a youngster growing up in Edinburg and selling minnows to the smallmouth fishermen, I sold more sculpins and madtoms than all of the other types of minnows combined. Minnows were a popular food for the bass then as now and the fishermen knew it.

Shenk's Black Sculpin is the best imitation of the real sculpin minnow I've ever found. Although Ed did not consider mimicking the madtom minnow as he devised this pattern, it is also the best fly I know to match these minnows. When a single fly can pass for two such important items in the smallmouths' diet, it's obvious you have found a real fish-catcher.

As most anglers are aware, sculpin minnows make their homes under freestone rocks in heavily aerated sections of our rivers. Thus, the basic down and across tactic just discussed will take many bass in these areas.

Madtoms also make their homes in similar areas, as well as in slightly

slower currents, and one can expect to pick up madtom-feeding bass here with the same tactics. However, an important aspect of the madtom's behavior has evaded some anglers. These catfishy-looking minnows leave the security of their stream-bottom fortresses to roam the rivers at night in search of food. Hence, the energetic angler who can get to the river at daylight can make some great catches of really large bass who stalk the madtoms for an easy breakfast of their own.

"The **James Wood Bucktail** sure looks like a small sunfish," ventured a friend, after taking several handsome bass on it. "I bet that's what they are taking it for in those shallows." I strongly suspect he was right, but this was an ocean-wide leap from the fly's origin.

Actually, one winter I had planned a bonefishing trip to Bermuda, and at the suggestion of Pete Perinchief who was then their director of sports fishing, I tied several different styles of bonefish flies according to his recipes. Well, I didn't get to go, and my Scotch blood would not permit discarding Pete's flies. So, I tried them on my Shenandoah River smallmouths. Most were failures, but the ones tied with yellow, white and blue components were unbelievably successful.

Every year when the young sunfish are hatching off the beds, I go to the James Wood Bucktail and make some great catches. What's in the name? It seems these are the colors of James Wood High School in Winchester, so one of my students labeled it. Said it sounded stupid to fish for bass with Pete's Bonefish Fly!

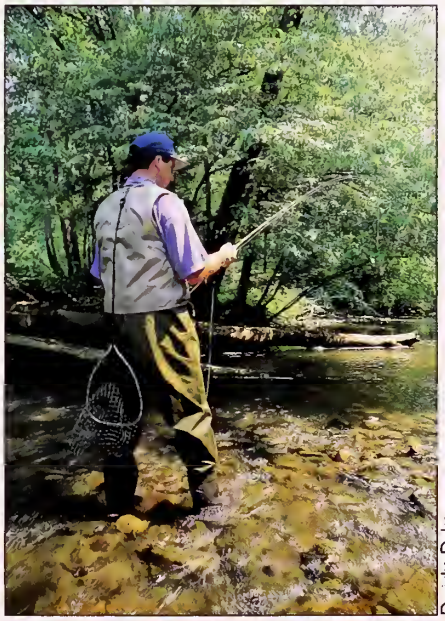
Waterman's Silver Outcast is another stepchild to our smallmouth streamer selection. Charlie Waterman "found" this fly in Pennsylvania and showed it to his fly-tier friend Dan Bailey, explaining that this "Silver Doctor Salmon Streamer sure did a great job on Florida largemouths." Dan instantly realized that it was a simplified forgery of the lofty salmon fly and named it the "Silver Outcast." Well, when Waterman came to Virginia to fish for smallmouths with me many years ago, we tried this renegade pattern, and soon the word spread of its effectiveness. Today it is one of the most highly regarded of all smallmouth streamers, receiving top billing in several books on bass.

The Silver Outcast really is the finest shiner minnow imitation I've ever found. As you know, shiner minnows are found throughout all of Virginia's smallmouth streams, taking up their residences on shallow gravel bars and in aquatic grassbeds. In selecting these areas as their home, it almost seems the minnows realize they rank high on the bass's list of favorite foods and are trying to get away from them. However, bass know their locations, and skim the shallows, slashing through the grass for their easy meals.

Thus, these are the two primary areas we should ply our Silver Outcast Streamers. I like to position myself about 50 feet out in the river from the grass beds and gravel bars and methodically search these edges with my flies.

Sometimes, however, we need a streamer to cover a variety of situations which just don't fall neatly into our checklist of natural foods, or that may overlap with several foods in one area. The **Olive Strymph** was developed for just this type situation. Possessing a very lively action with minimal manipulation, it is very effective where one requires a very slow, seductive fly movement. It has a broad silhouette, thus passing for a big minnow which may tempt a huge bass that overlooks a lesser morsel.

All of the downstream tactics thus far discussed can be used quite successfully with the Strymph. But it really has one niche cornered; its style of construction enables it to be fished upstream more effectively than any streamer we have. This was no accident, but part of the need for which the Strymph was developed.



Dwight Dyke

Select your bass flies from a fish eye's view, and you'll be on your way to successfully reeling in smallmouths throughout the Commonwealth. Smallmouth bass fly photos by Harry Murray.

8

Casual Dress Nymph

9

Tappley Bass Bug

10

Shenandoah Damsel Popper

For example, there are times when bass hold deeply, apparently uninterested in feeding. However, sometimes these fish can be teased into striking a fly. This is when I fish the Strymph with a technique I call the bounce retrieve. Positioning myself downstream of the water I plan to fish, I cast my Strymph well above the bass's anticipated holding position and allow it to sink to the stream bottom. At this point I begin a slow downstream retrieve and methodically lift and drop my rod tip in order to jig my fly along the bottom. I'm constantly amazed how many large bass I take with this technique in areas where they were totally oblivious to conventional tactics.

Now let's investigate three underwater forms of some important aquatic insects which anglers casually refer to as "nymphs."

The **Murray's Hellgrammite,** developed primarily by Ron Kommer, is the most productive bass nymph I've ever used. In fact, if I could have only two flies for all of my smallmouth fishing, it would be the Murray's Hellgrammite and Shenk's White Streamer. (I can't tell you which one would win in a shootout, and I hope I never have to drop either.)

Real hellgrammites—the larvae of the dobson fly—are the largest insects available to our bass and with their three-year life cycle, we know they are always available to the bass. Also, reaching four inches long at maturity, they provide a lot of groceries to the bass. Our improved statewide water quality has sparked great hellgrammite population. Each year I believe I see more of their white egg masses than the year before as they hang conspicuously like small dabs of cotton candy below the leaves.

Riffles are the hot spots for real hellgrammites and I make some of my best catches by fishing these areas upstream dead drift with the Murray's Hellgrammites. Many of the students in my schools are very impressed with their success with this tactic. By encouraging them to fish a short line (about 20 feet) upstream, they quickly learn drag control and strike detection, and rapidly develop a degree of confidence that actually surprises them. It is very rewarding to watch this refinement develop in a budding angler of any age.

The **Dragonfly Nymph** is a slight refinement to our smallmouth game which Charlie Brook (the late trout master) of Montana talked me into as we sat in the Dude Dining Room in West Yellowstone after a day's trouting. An easy way to take many nice bass on Dragonfly Nymphs is to fish the edges of the grass beds with a very slow fly stripping action. Since the real nymphs move along in short spurts, the bass respond readily to this tactic. Try to drop your fly as close to the grass as you can and if there are small, open-water pockets back into the grass, explore these thoroughly. Bass often prowl such areas and will grab your nymph quickly.

The **Casual Dress Nymph** is the best pattern I've ever found to fish the slow, deep pools, for it passes well for the broad variety of insects found here. An easy, but effective, tactic is to cast the nymph across stream, allow it to sink to the bottom, then retrieve it through all of the likely looking areas. Experimentation will reveal the most effective fly action for each area on a specific day. But, keep an open mind and be versatile, for the bass's whims may quickly change. Frequently, my most productive tactic is a very slow, line-hand stripping action, where I move the fly about six inches, pause for several seconds, then strip it again. The line-hand-twist, where the line is recovered at a uniform rate permitting the Casual Dress Nymph to *crawl* slowly across the stream bottom, is also an effective ploy.

Both the bass and fly angler like surface bugs, and this is where one can look with respect upon some fine traditions which we have inherited. No, we cannot reach back as far as the trout anglers who pay homage to the horsehair leaders and greenheart rods that spawned their sport in England so long ago, but the bass angler's ancestry is still noble.

The **Tappley Bass Bug**, coming from the vise of the highly respected H. G. Tappley of "Taps Tips" fame in *Field & Stream* magazine, brings both nostalgia and confidence to this one pattern. Over the past 50 years, this bug has probably caught more bass than its next five rivals combined. This is appropriate, for not only has Mr. Tappley brought so much dignity to this sport for so many years, but his son is holding the banner equally high.

The **Shenandoah Damsel Popper** is a second surface bug I like, and although lacking the decades of devotees of the Tappley Bass Bug, its recent track record is extremely impressive. In fact, if I were restricted to only one popper-style bug, this would be it. Although developed to take advantage of the great number of bass which seem addicted to our hordes of natural damselflies, the Shenandoah Damsel Popper works extremely well in all situations.

The tactics for fishing both of these surface bugs call for experimentation in order to meet the demands of the bass. However, a few guidelines which come from the Trial and Error Academy may help you.

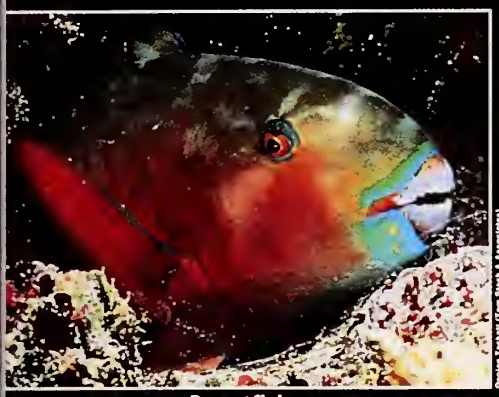
The banks are real hot spots for surface-feeding bass; shade, water depth and natural foods all make this so. I like to get about 50 feet off the bank and ply my bugs in tight against the bank every several feet as I work downstream. How fast should we manipulate our surface bugs? Very, very slowly. In fact, if in doubt, slow down.

Fly sizes for smallmouth bass should be determined by water condition and the bass's preferences. Normally, heavier water calls for larger flies. Basically, sizes 4, 6, and 8 cover the majority of our needs.

As you can see from this fly selection, one does not need a broad selection of smallmouth flies to fish successfully throughout the Old Dominion—if they are selected from a fish's point of view. □

Harry Murray is a freelance writer who teaches fishing and fly tying in Edinburg, Virginia.

Home Is Where The Habitat Is



Parrotfish

Fireweed

Common Buckeye Butterfly

Black Rhinoceros

Lynx

West Indian Manatee

Millipede

Eastern Screech-Owl

Spotted Salamander

I'iwi

Forest Visitors

Snapping Turtle

National Wildlife Week
April 16-22, 1995

Sponsored by National Wildlife Federation

Canon

Canon USA, Inc. supports the National Wildlife Federation. Canon's philosophy of living and working together for the common good encourages harmony with ecology and the environment.

Soc Clay

Sweet Nothin

There is nothing like sweet turkey talk to bring a gobbler running. But what kind of call will really get his feathers ruffled? Read on.

By Gerald Almy

Jim Clay pointed to a knoll edging an open field in the dim gray light and whispered. "Set up there, wherever you find a good tree. I'll go down the hollow in case he heads across to the opposite ridge."

Clay, co-owner of Perfection Turkey Calls in Winchester, had located a gobbler the evening before and invited me to join him to try for the bird. Usually when I'm hunting with this former World Champion caller, I let him do the calling and simply set up nearby with my shotgun propped across my knees, but Clay decided we'd split up on this

The spring turkey hunter has a wealth of calls at his or her disposal. For the avid hunter, having so many choices is a bit like being a kid in a candy store. We'll have one (no, make that three or four!) of each.

bird in case it headed a different direction. Generous host that he is, Jim had me take the best position, while he took the second most likely route the gobbler would take after leaving the roost.

The tom was bellowing loudly as I set up against a huge oak about 150 yards away. After scraping away the leaves and settling in, I slipped a Perfection Raspy D diaphragm call into my mouth, gave a soft tree yelp and waited. The big gobbler responded heartily. I could hear Jim call down in the hollow and the bird answered him, too. Then, a real hen called to my left, further from the gobbler than I was. The tom answered her as well.

I yelped a bit louder, then clucked softly. The tom gobbled twice. He was on the ground and heading my way. I clucked again and the tom thundered back, even closer. I could see him now, easing his way through the trees. Inching the 12 gauge side-by-side into final aiming position as he moved behind a tree, I tried to stay calm and not look too hard at his long, flopping beard. This was easily the biggest tom I had ever seen, and he was coming on hard to my calls, puffed out in half-strut position.

When the gobbler stepped clear of the last sapling, I aimed at the bird's neck. He stretched out his head, looking hard for the hen he thought he had heard. Slowly I squeezed the trigger. The copper-plated 6's flew true and I rushed to claim the beautiful turkey laying on the brown leaves. It was a handsome tom of 22 pounds with a beard just a quarter-inch shy of a foot, and long, sharp spurs. Yelping and clucking on the diaphragm call had enticed the bird to within 17 steps.

Turkey calls. Without them, spring gobbler hunting would be a paltry sport, if not an impossible one. It is so much the essence of the sport that some hunters get out without firearms before the season and after it trying to lure birds in, because they simply can't get enough of that rush of feeling that comes when a heavy-voiced tom answers your call and marches into view thundering all the way, trying to find the hen he thinks he hears. Other than perhaps rattling in a whitetail buck or calling in a flock of geese, no thrill in hunting can come close to working in a spring tom with a call.

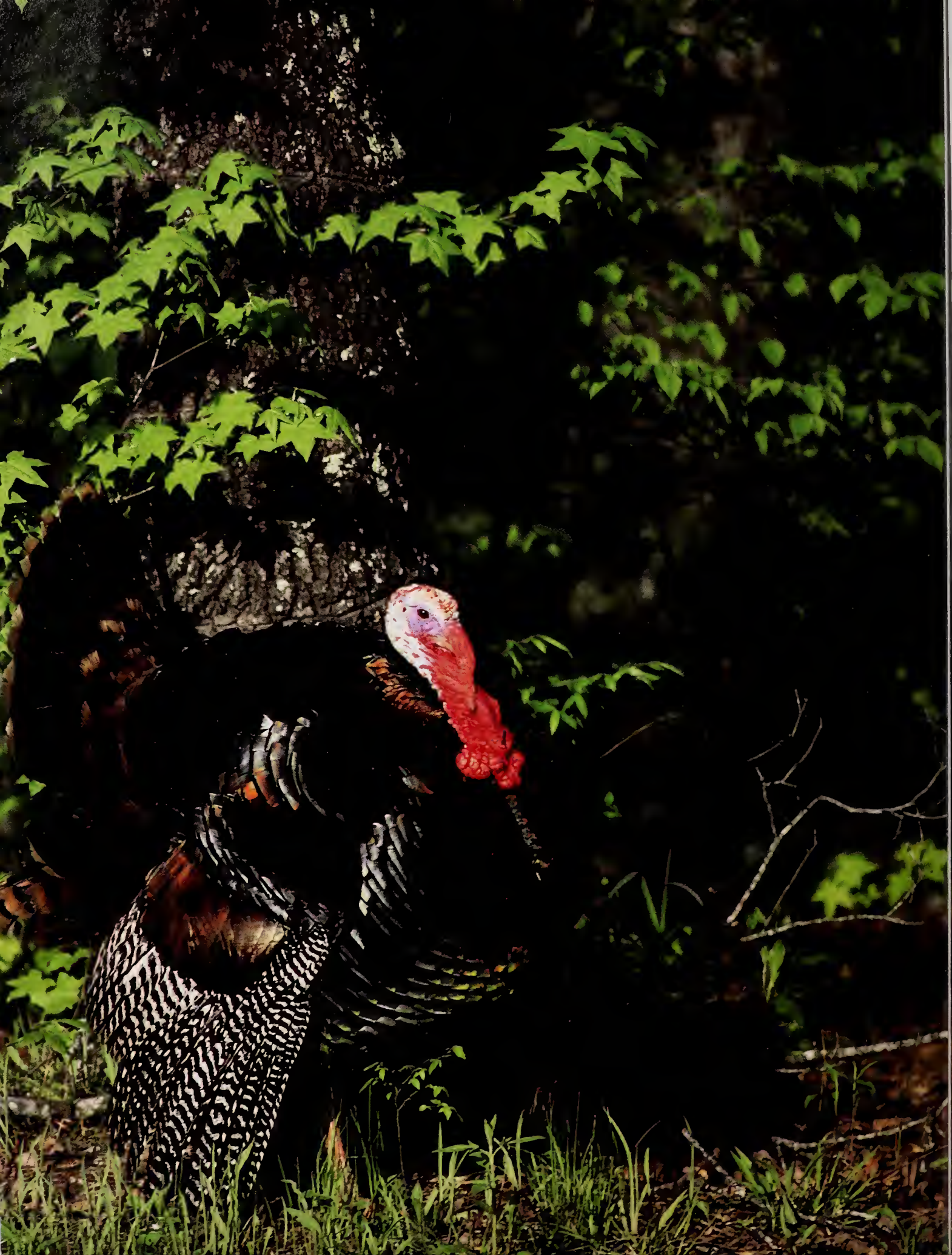
But how do you decide which of the hundreds of calls on the market are right for you, and which are best for the different hunting situations and weather you might encounter? There's an endless variety of calls to choose from, each with its advantages and disadvantages and each operating in a different manner. To help you decide which calls are most appropriate to buy and learn to use, let's look at the various types available, their strong and weak points, and which are best for a given hunter.

First of all, it's important to understand that there are two basic types of calls—friction and mouth. Drawing two objects across each other creates the sound in friction calls. Blowing or sucking air through various devices creates sounds in mouth calls.

Expert turkey hunters rated diaphragm mouth calls as their most useful and consistently productive calls. The very earliest versions of these calls were simply leaves that a hunter positioned in the top of his mouth and blew air through. The vibrations created a credible yelp that would draw in toms in the old days of light hunting pressure.

By the 1930's, an ingenious hunter decided to take a U-shaped piece of metal, make a frame and stretch latex over it to create a more durable call than a leaf provided. This was the first modern diaphragm call. By using different tongue pressure and varying the flow of air and movement of your jaws, you can create loud or quiet calls and imitate a wide variety of turkey sounds such as clucks, yelps, purrs, cutting and cackling with a diaphragm.

As years went by, call makers began using a colored plastic tape over the metal frame to make it easier to control in the mouth, and thinner latex than originally used. While the basic design of these calls has changed little over the years, manufacturers offer a wide variety of styles of call. Some have two or even three layers of overlapping latex, others separate multiple layers of rubber, still others split them on the



sides or in the middle slightly. These variations create a variety of turkey sounds, from high-pitched to low tones, clear to coarse and raspy.

Which do turkeys prefer? No one can answer that question because each turkey responds differently. Even from day to day the same turkey might change its preference. Since diaphragms are inexpensive ($3-$8), the best bet is to buy several companies' calls and different models of each, then experiment until you feel you are getting the most realistic turkey imitations you can. After lots of practice, experiment in the woods and see which brings the best results for you as far as luring in toms under different conditions of weather, hunting pressure and time of the season.

Besides being inexpensive, mouth calls have other advantages. They are compact and you can carry a number of them in small plastic cases. They produce a wide variety of calls well. And since they are used in your mouth, no movement is required that could spook a tom as it approaches. On the negative side, some people have difficulty getting good sounds out of these calls and you have to be careful not to get excited and swallow or choke on the call (something that happens very rarely.)

Tube calls were first created out of old snuff cans. Most models today are made from plastic or wood. They are constructed with a rubber reed stretched over a circular tube type mouthpiece that you blow through. As air flows over the reed and through the tube, a loud call is created. These calls only take one hand to use, which is an advantage over friction calls, and they can also be heard from great distances. This makes them especially valuable for locating toms on windy days when softer calls might be harder for the turkeys to hear. They also create very credible gobbles, although great care must be used when imitating a tom so that you are not mistaken by other hunters for a turkey. It is best to use a gobbler call only when you are on private land and are certain there are no other hunters in the area.

Wingbone calls were originally created from the bones of wild turkeys. Some hunters still use these homemade versions today, created from the radius bone in a turkey's wing and one or two larger wing bones glued on to create more volume. To use these calls, you make a sucking-kissing motion with your mouth and pull air into the call, rather than blowing through it. They are a bit tricky to use, but once you get the knack, they are great locator calls that can be heard for long distances.

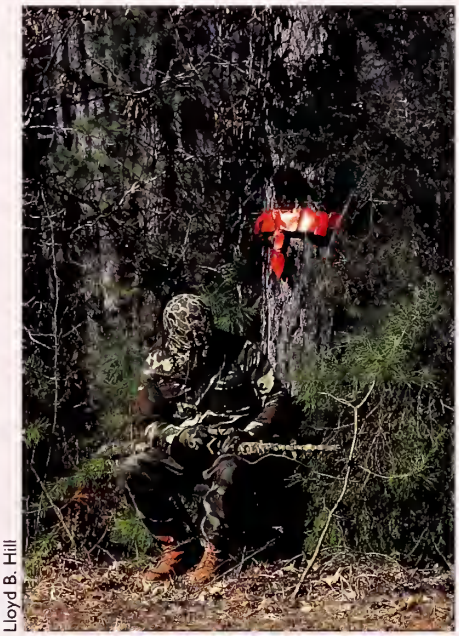
Several commercial versions of these calls are available, created from wood and plastic, and a few companies actually sell calls made from real bones. These aren't calls you'll use a lot, but when everything else seems to fail, their sweet, clear sound can often draw a gobble out of sulking toms, particularly late in the morning. You can then switch to other calls to work the bird within shotgun range.

Box calls are one of the most popular types of turkey calls, particularly among novice hunters. However, even experts use these when conditions seem right or when the turkeys are responding to them.

Hinged versions are most com-

Gerald Almy

Each call, from the mouth to the box, from slate to Plexiglas and puslipen, has its own quirky sound and even tonal variation between individual calls of the same design. The key is to be accomplished in a variety of calls to lure even the most discriminating gobbler into range.



Lloyd B. Hill

Spring turkey hunting is a sport revolving around the use of calls. But for safety's sake, along with a pocketful of calls, every hunter should carry along a blaze orange sash to wrap around a stand tree and a prized trophy.

mon. These are built with a small rectangular wooden box and a hinged lid attached that's pulled across the open side of the box to create common turkey sounds. Yelps, purrs, clucks, cutting, and cackling can all be done with a hinged box call.

The first box call was created in Dardanelle, Arkansas in 1897 from a piece of poplar that had been hollowed out. M.L. Lynch, of Alabama, created the original modern version of these calls in the 1940's when he used glue and thin pieces of mahogany to create a box that yielded better sounds than the single chunk of hollowed-out wood. Today, a variety of woods are used for these calls, such as ash, cedar, walnut and oak, but other than that, the design has changed little in the last half-century.

Sizes vary, but the most popular box calls are about five to seven inches long with a handle that extends another two inches past the end of the box. These calls are great for beginners. In just minutes you can be creating realistic yelps and clucks—the two most vital spring turkey calls. Cutting—a series of excited, sharp, rapid-paced clucks—is also easily mastered on hinged box calls.

Even experienced hunters should have one good box call they keep in their vest. There are some days when they simply yield more responses than diaphragms, tubes or wing bones. This is especially true if the birds are pressured hard by good callers who use diaphragms almost all the time. Prices vary from $12 to $30.

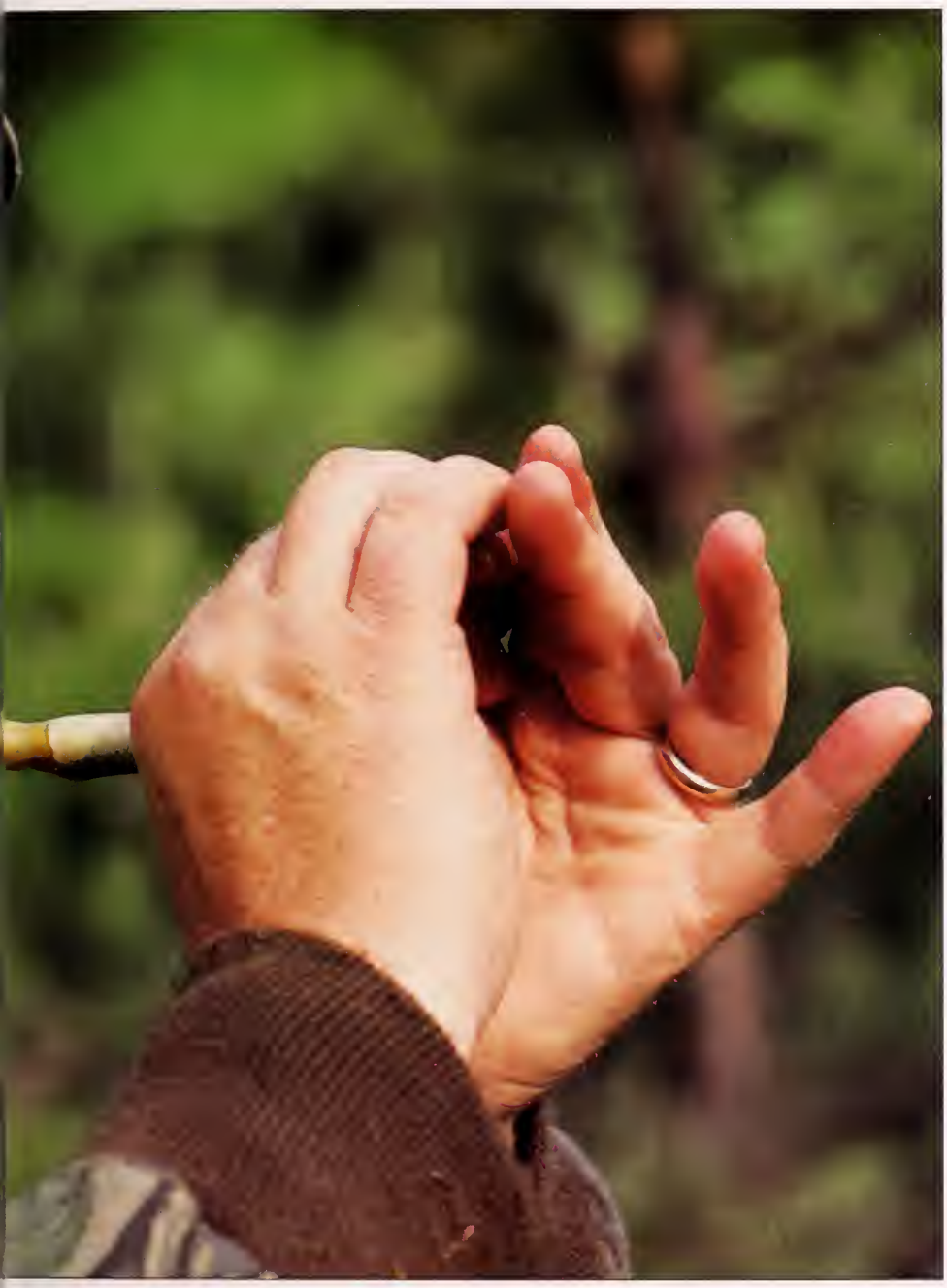
Unhinged box calls are another good option. These are smaller than hinged versions and the striker is not attached to the box. Because of this you'll never get any accidental squeaks or off-key calls as you're walking through the woods with them, and they create a softer, quieter sound that often is the key to drawing in toms.

Drawing the striker across the box different distances and speeds creates yelps, clucks and purrs. Prices run from $7 to $15. It's important with both types of box calls to keep them well chalked where the two surfaces are rubbed together to get the best sounds. Box calls also work best on dry days and not on wet ones, since moisture can ruin the sound.

Push-pen calls are easy to use and great for beginners. To create clucks, purrs or yelps, simply push the wood rod through the box, varying distances and at different speeds. The "fighting purr," popularized by callers David Hale and Harold Knight, is made by using two push-pen calls simultaneously to create a raucous purring sound like two gobblers in battle—sort of like rat-

Soc Clay

Becoming proficient on a turkey wingbone takes some time, but often can be sweet music to a recalcitrant gobbler's ear.



tling antlers to draw in white-tailed bucks. This is not a call that produces all the time, but is worth having in your bag of tricks when other methods fail. Push-pens are handy because they can be worked with just slight finger motion, so there's little likelihood of spooking approaching toms. Prices are about $12 to $20.

Another friction call that's simple to use is the Crank Turkey Call by Olt. This box call has a handle that you simply crank in a circle. That draws the lid over a sound chamber and produces clucks and yelps.

The final friction calls useful for Virginia toms are ***slate*** and ***glass***. These pie-shaped calls consist of wood or plastic chambers and feature either single or multiple layers of slate or Plexiglas or a combination of materials over the sound chamber. By pulling a wooden or Plexiglas striker across this surface at a slight angle, you can create a myriad of turkey sounds such as clucks, yelps, purrs and cutting.

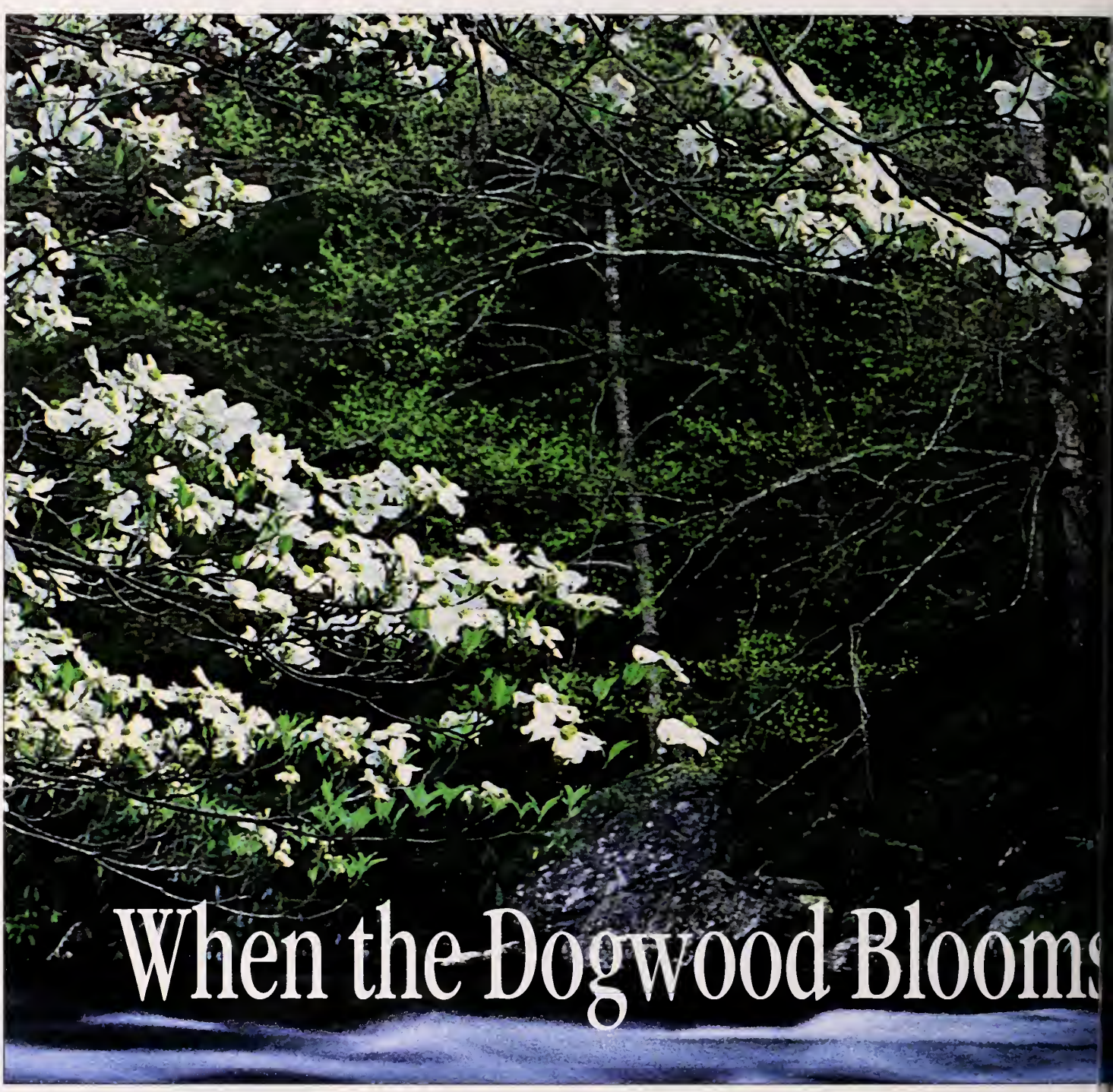
It takes a bit of practice to feel comfortable with these calls, but they are easier than diaphragms to master. Glass versions will work even in the rain, but slates are not effective in wet weather. The sound from these calls doesn't carry as far as, say tube calls or hinged boxes, but they can create very realistic turkey sounds and are good choices when diaphragms don't produce, and for close-in work. Prices range from $10 to$25.

Besides these calls, you'll also want to carry a few ***locators*** such as crow and owl calls. Both are excellent for pinpointing where toms are without using turkey talk. I like to use owl calls in the predawn when toms are just likely to be starting to call from the roost. Pinpoint the bird by getting him to gobble, then move in to within 100-200 yards and set up before trying turkey calls on him.

The crow call comes in handy later in the morning, when owls are less likely to be hooting. Turkeys often respond well to these natural enemies, alerting you to their location. Then you can set up and try luring them into range with sweet hen talk. And when you do entice a puffed-out, red and blue-headed tom into clear shotgun range, you'll have experienced one of the greatest pleasures in the outdoors—all thanks to calls. □

Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for over 19 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of Sports Afield.

Wild turkey; photo by Lloyd B. Hill



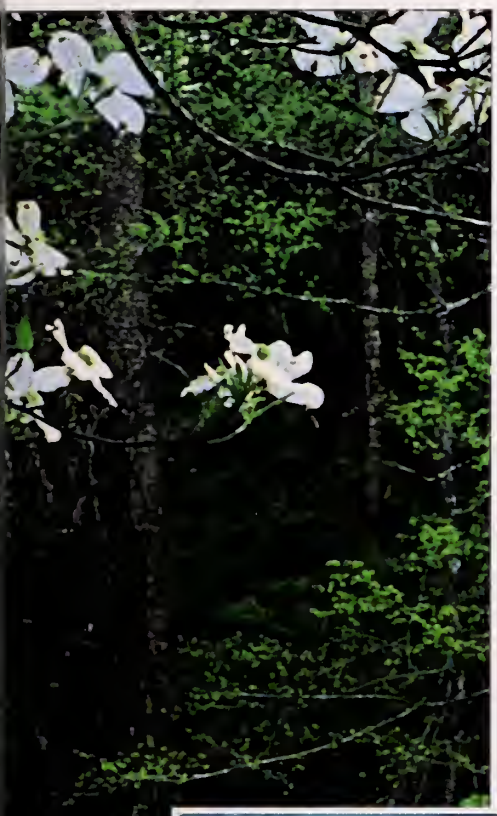
When the Dogwood Blooms

Bill Lea

Striped bass begin their spawning run up the Staunton and Dan Rivers every year when the dogwood blooms—and anglers are there to greet them.

by Steve Ausband

I have been told that striped bass in Kerr Reservoir swim upriver to spawn in the springtime when the water reaches a temperature of 58° to 60°F. I don't know of many striper fishermen who take water temperature readings,



though. Most of them go by the dogwood blooms in late April and early May. When the banks of the Dan and Staunton Rivers are a solid green wall of willows, and the hardwoods beyond the fields that stretch along each side of the river are laced with the white of dogwood blossoms and the bright purple of redbuds, then it won't be long before the stripers run.

The history of the striped bass in Buggs Island Lake, the local name for John H. Kerr Reservoir, is one of the bright success stories in modern fisheries management. There had been stripers (also called rockfish or rock) in the Roanoke River and its tributaries for centuries before any dams were built, of course. These were anadromous fish, living most of their lives in saltwater and returning inland every spring to spawn. The stretch of rapids on the Roanoke River near Weldon, North Carolina, where stripers were concentrated in their journey to the spawning grounds, was once a famous fishing spot.

When Kerr Dam was completed in 1953, it trapped some of the fish in the impounded water. Biologists added to this population by stocking striped bass larvae in the early 60's, in the hopes that the fish would find the 50,000-acre reservoir an acceptable susbstitute for life in the ocean, and continue to spawn upriver every spring.

Doug Stamm

Soc Clay

Striped bass begin their spawning run up the Roanoke and Dan Rivers out of Buggs Island Lake when the water temperatures reach 58 to 60°F. But you don't need to test the waters to find out when the fish are running. Just look up. Are the dogwoods in bloom?

And it worked. The fertilized eggs of a striped bass are not quite buoyant enough to float in still water. If they were released in a lake or reservoir, they could sink to the bottom, become covered in silt, and never hatch. They must be buoyed up by constantly moving water, such as exists in many of the great rivers feeding the Chesapeake Bay or North Carolina's big sounds, for the eggs to hatch. Drifting downstream for about three days (in 60°F water), the eggs are suspended until hatching; the egg sac is absorbed in a few days, and the tiny fish are on their own.

Most reservoirs cannot offer river-spawning fish the 40 miles or more of freely-running river needed for a successful hatch, but in the Dan and Staunton Rivers, which feed into Kerr Reservoir from the west and north, yearling stripers began showing up in the mid-1950's. Biologists quickly understood how the fish had adapted. The spawning stripers had simply regarded the reservoir as a small ocean, and the two major rivers had become their coastal streams.

Spawning striped bass would swim up the Dan, for instance, as far as the dam at the Brantley Steam Plant, inside the city limits of Danville, and their eggs would be tumbled and floated back downstream toward Buggs Island, nearly 50 miles away. As a result, a saltwater fish is now living, reproducing, and providing an outstanding sport fishery.

The stripers in Buggs Island not only breed successfully in the two

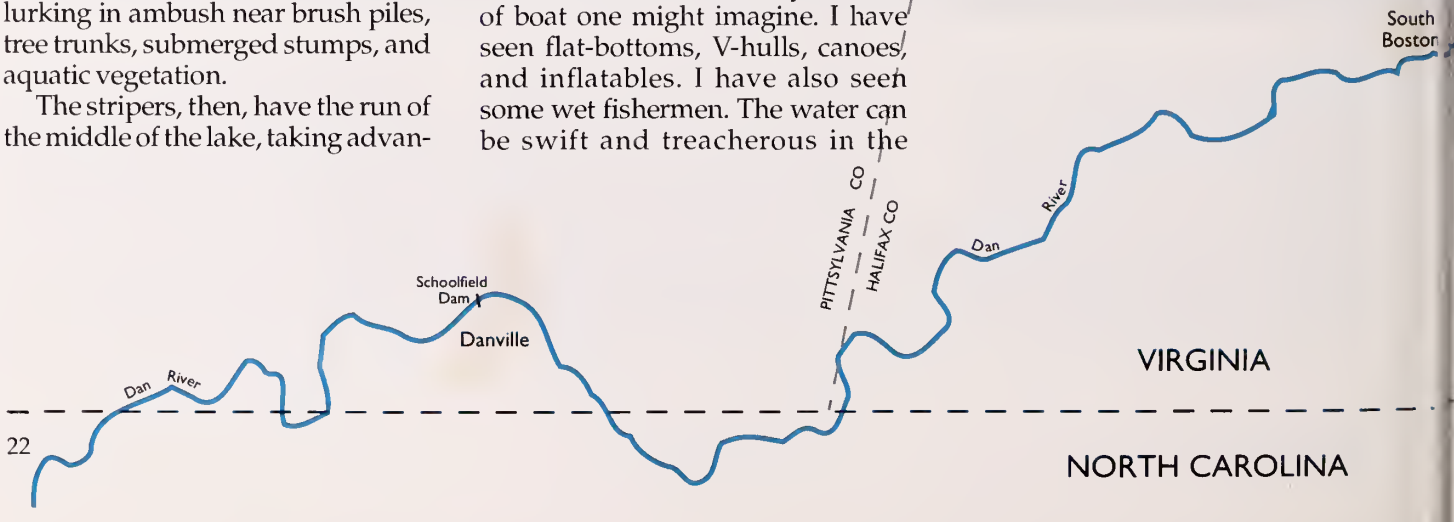
Dwight Dyke

Striped bass historically migrated from the Atlantic Ocean into North Carolina's Albemarle Sound and up the Roanoke River into Virginia every spring. With the completion of Kerr Reservoir and Lake Gaston, ocean fish no longer make the migratory trip up into the Staunton-Roanoke and Dan Rivers. However, healthy populations of striped bass making their home in the reservoirs continue to make the migratory journey, reproducing and providing anglers with some eagerly anticipated fishing every spring.
Map graphics by Pels

major rivers that feed the lake; they also occupy a previously empty niche in the food chain of the reservoir. Striped bass, like bluefish, mackerel, and many other saltwater species, are primarily open-water feeders. That is, they spend a majority of their time roaming the wide open spaces looking for schools of baitfish. Bass, pickerel, and crappie, on the other hand are riverine predators, and they feed largely by lurking in ambush near brush piles, tree trunks, submerged stumps, and aquatic vegetation.

The stripers, then, have the run of the middle of the lake, taking advantage of abundant herring, gizzard shad, and threadfin shad populations. Fishermen now cast to schools of stripers feeding on shad in the backs of coves in the big lake, or they jig or troll for them in deep water in the old river channels. But perhaps the most exciting and consistent fishing for striped bass is in the rivers when the dogwood blooms.

Striper fishermen fish from the riverbanks and from every manner of boat one might imagine. I have seen flat-bottoms, V-hulls, canoes, and inflatables. I have also seen some wet fishermen. The water can be swift and treacherous in the



spring, and the potential for tragedy cannot be overlooked (be sure to wear your PFD at all times). Generally, boat fishermen do better than bank fishermen, and those with the inclination to fish after dark or during the pre-dawn hours do best of all. Stripers feed most heavily in the cooler hours of the day and during the night. A noon trip is not necessarily a wasted effort, though. When the run is on, some very nice fish may be landed at just about any hour.

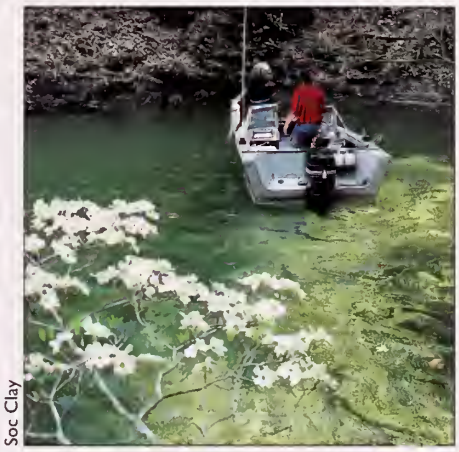
Anyone who is handy with a small cast net should have no trouble procuring bait for stripers. Shad, bream, or whatever the net brings up will work pretty well. Fresh, lively baits are much better than tired ones, and the only thing I have ever caught on dead shad was catfish.

Bucktail jigs in yellow, white, or red-and-white are popular, as are minnow imitations like the Rebel and Rapala. I once caught a small striper on a flyrod popper while I was bream fishing—which is not to say that tiny poppers are ideal lures, but only that stripers will sometimes hit anything. I have never tried a large streamer fly in the Staunton when the run is on, but I don't see why it wouldn't work. A striper on a flyrod, fighting among rocks and with the current in its favor, should be a lively challenge.

My own choice in artificials is a blue and silver Rebel about 3½ inches long. I never get far away from a cast net in spring and summer, however, and a lively shad on a sharp No. 2/0 hook is a more dependable fish catcher for me than a Rebel.

Stripers are big fish. Strong, too. A six-pounder in a swift river full of boulders and logs can put a strain on bass tackle unless the fisherman is very handy with his drag. And a six-pound striper is not a very big one. Ten and 12 pounders are fairly common, and it usually takes something closer to 20 pounds to get many raised eyebrows—or to have a ghost of a chance to win one of the many pots.

In communities like Milton, N.C., just across the river from Virginia, and in larger towns like Danville, striper fishermen often compete for the biggest fish (striped bass tournaments require a permit from VDGIF). Shore fishermen often use saltwater spinning tackle, partly because the long rods aid in casting to hot spots, and partly because the fishermen hope to land a fish of considerable size. Boaters can get by



Soc Clay

with lighter and handier equipment, since they can fight the fish in somewhat more open water.

Good fishing spots can be found all the way from Brookneal to Buggs Island on the Staunton River, and from the lake to the city limits of Danville on the Dan. A lively temporary community sets up camp near the old city fairgrounds, located adjacent to the river in Danville. There are facilities for launching a small boat (a very small boat) at City Farm there.

There is a better ramp near Milton, N.C. about seven miles east of Danville on Highway 62, and during the height of the run the parking lot is full of cars and trailers. This ramp is in the North Carolina section of the river and is maintained by the N.C. Department of Natural Resources.

Downstream at South Boston, VDGIF maintains a boat ramp on the Dan River with launching facilities for powerboats. On the Staunton River, there are seven public access points between Leesville Reservoir and Buggs Island Lake. (A detailed map describing six of these access points was featured in the March 91 issue of *Virginia Wildlife* and copies are still available for $1 each (make check payable to the Treasurer of Virginia) from VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.)

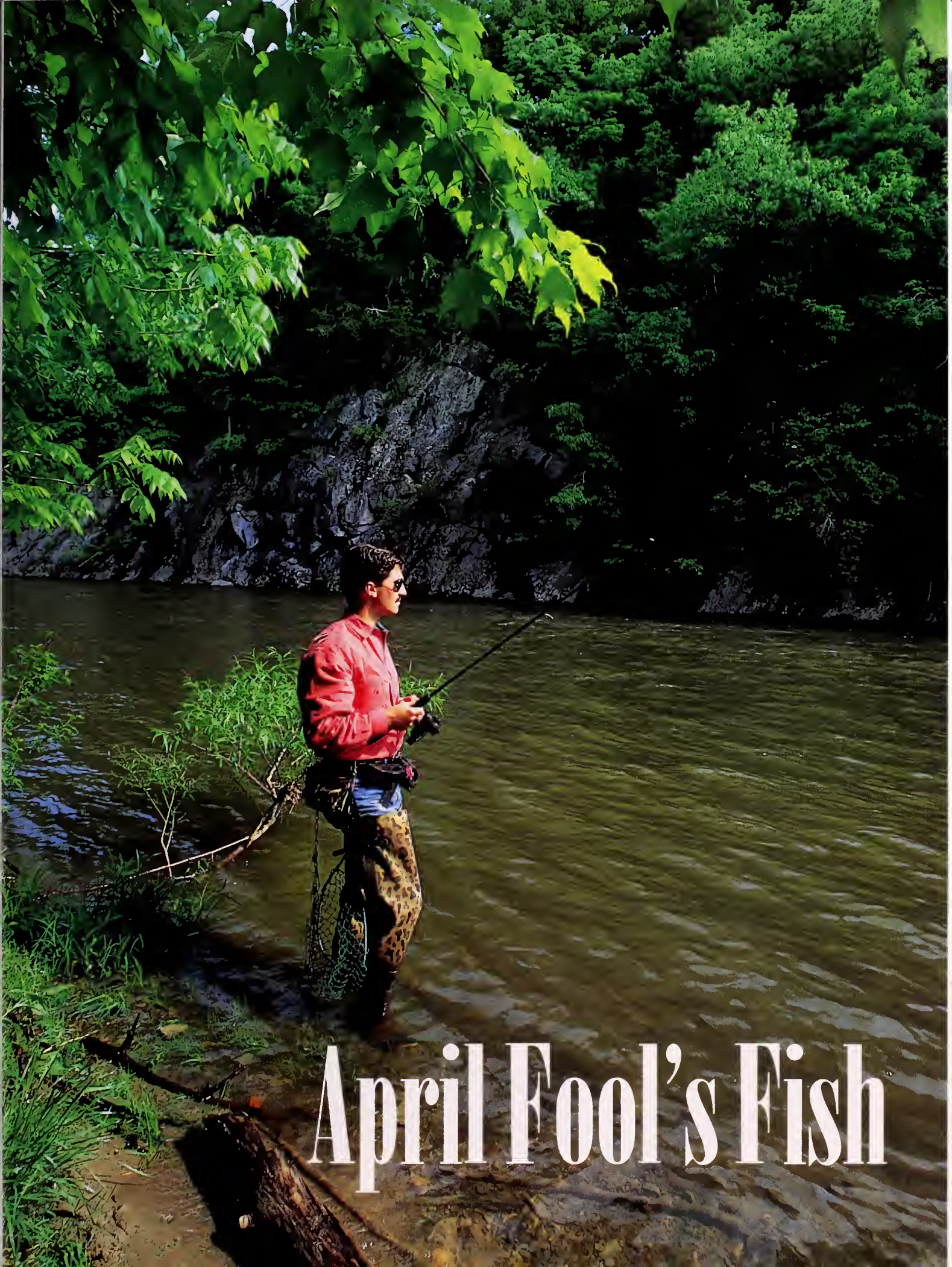
Stripers were in the Roanoke River system long before there was a Buggs Island Lake, but few people caught them. Rob Sheets told me his father caught one in the Dan River in the 1930's, and neither the elder Sheets nor the neighbors could be quite sure what he had caught. Ironically, the dam that should have finished the striper in this part of Virginia only increased its numbers and brought it to public attention. The enthusiasm of spring striper fishermen in this area, in fact, is rivaled only by that of spring turkey hunters. For both, the dogwood bloom signals the beginning of the excitement. As for myself, I have an even easier way of checking the progress of the striper run in the springtime. I just watch the parking lot by the Milton bridge. □

Steve Ausband is the chairman of the English Department of Averett College in Danville, and an avid hunter and fisherman.

Bringing in a rich reward of spring, photo by Soc Clay

Staunton River bank fishing, photo by Dwight Dyke

Striped bass catch, photo by Soc Clay



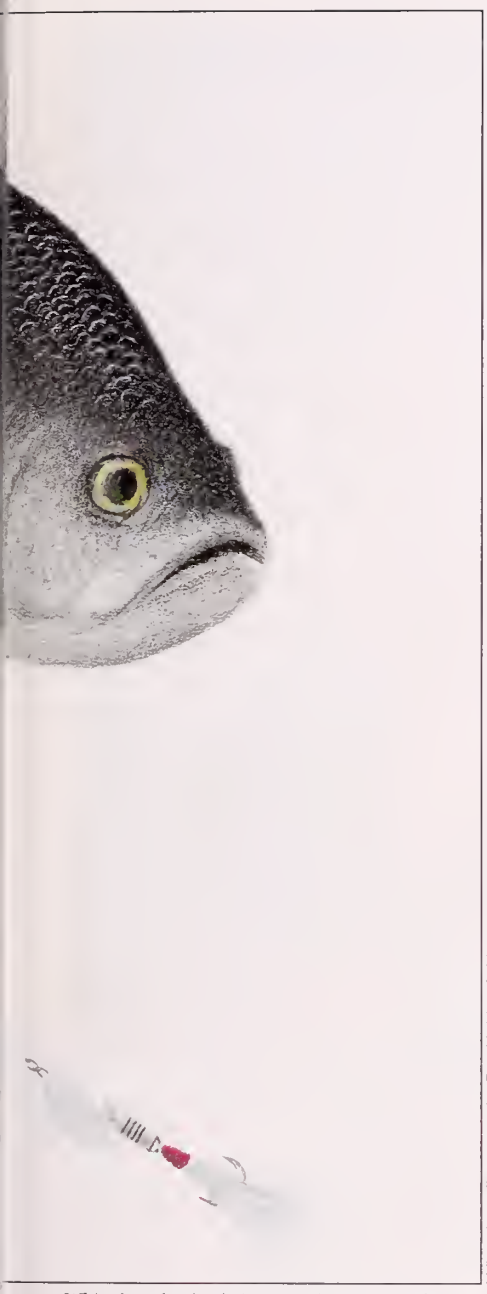
April Fool's Fish

by Bruce Ingram

The white bass run on the South Fork of the Holston River can be an angler's dream. But don't be fooled. They can play a good game of hide and seek.

The annual white bass run out of South Holston Lake up the South Fork of the Holston River is a lot like the little girl with the curl. When she was good, she was very good. But when she was bad, she was horrid.

For decades, the annual spawning run of white bass, also known simply as stripes, has been a much-



White bass illustration by Eric H. Mansfield

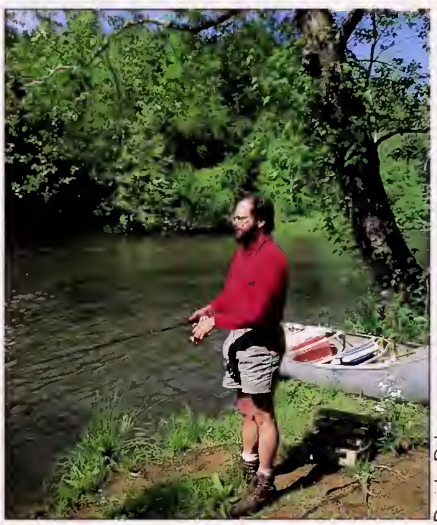
White bass begin their spawning run up the South Fork of the Holston River every spring. Roostertail spinners and Thinfins are a favorite of anglers to catch these sporting fish.

anticipated event in far western Virginia. Adding to the allure of this tradition is the sheer unpredictability of just when the run will begin and how intense it will be when it does. For just like the little girl with the curl, Holston's white bass have a fickle streak. Hilton Rector, a retired bakeryman from Chilhowie, has been chasing after this game fish for some 40 years and admits that he hasn't figured the species out yet.

"I can catch them when they swallow the hook, but I have to tell you, the annual run is a hard thing to figure out," he said. "It can be ridiculously easy or ridiculously hard to catch fish—there's almost no telling which. Some days you can go down to the river and you will catch so many that you have a hard time carrying them all back to the car. Other days, you will have to fish hard all day just to catch 10 or so. And then there will be days when you won't be able to catch a single fish."

Rector thinks that water temperature has a lot to do with it. "White bass don't seem to bite well until the temperature reaches the 65 to 70-degree range. If a cold front comes through after the stripes have started hitting, and the temperature drops five degrees, they turn off. In 1989, for example, the fish were really biting well one day. But a cold rain fell that night and the next day, it was like someone had run every fish out of the Holston."

Generally the white bass run begins around April 20 and lasts around 30 days. While this period generally constitutes the peak of the run, action can also be found both earlier and later. According to retired VDGIF regional fisheries manager Bob Wollitz, the run may also be interrupted several times due to temperature changes, or the run may be of shorter duration should ideal temperatures remain stable for a few weeks.



Dwight Dyke

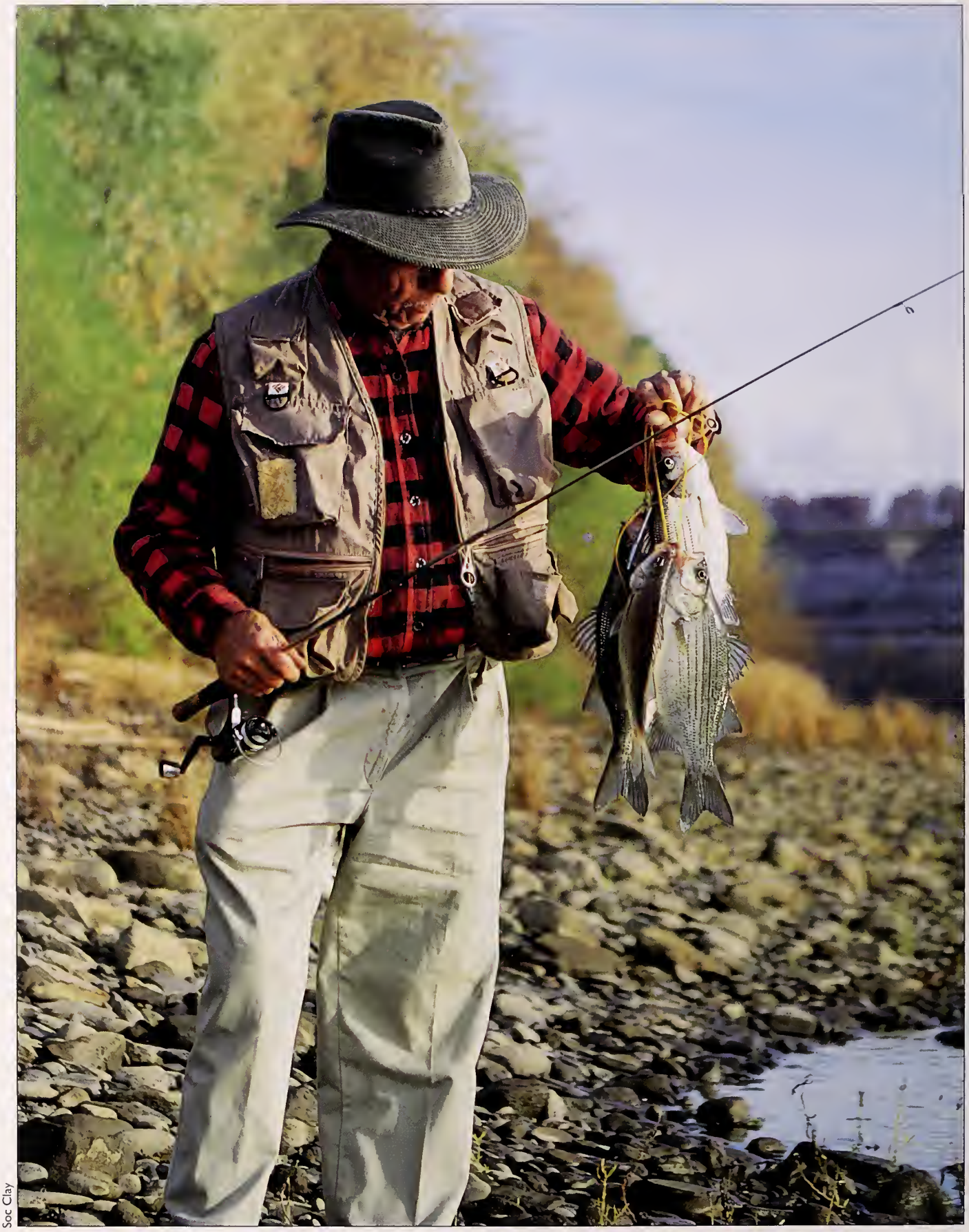
White bass males, which are typically smaller than the females, usually begin moving up the South Fork of the Holston in early April or even in late March if the winter has been mild. These males often range in size from 10 to 14 inches, but there are many smaller ones as well.

But while the males may weigh only a ½ pound or so, the jumbo females—which usually don't begin showing up until mid-April—can tip the scales at between two and three pounds. Since a 2½ pounder is considered a trophy fish by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the potential for outstanding sport is obvious when the females start their spawning run.

When the run begins in earnest, legions of female stripes will deposit anywhere from 250,000 to 950,000 eggs apiece. The males will feverishly court those females by emitting milt as the eggs settle to the river floor, and adhere to rocks. Since white bass do not build nests, the survival of the eggs is largely dependent on current and favorable water temperature (from 60 to 65 °F) to hatch.

If the current and water temperatures are favorable, large numbers of fry will survive, often resulting in a phenomenal run of this species in following years. Since white bass are a schooling species, the possibilities of superlative angling action are apparent. After they have reached several inches in size, stripes feed basically on minnows and shad, which leads us to a discussion of which lures work best for this game fish.

"Roostertail spinners are a favorite lure of mine, but just about any in-line spinner will work," says Rector. "Sometimes small minnow-like plugs will produce well and a lot of people down here will use Rebel and Rapala minnows. When I am having trouble catching white bass, I will switch to creek minnows. I'll put a small splitshot about 12 inches behind the minnow and then put a small float about six feet behind the shot. Of course, the float's place on the line will vary until you find the fish."



Soc Clay

Claude Karnes, an angler from Abingdon who fishes the run nearly every day, agrees with Hilton Rector on lure choices for white bass.

"Any kind of lure that will imitate a minnow or a shad will work, but I like Thinfins the best," said Karnes. "The best fishing occurs when the water is a little dingy, and a lure that is fluorescent colored always seems to do better than one which has a natural finish. If the water gets real clear, the fishing is much harder and then it's time to use minnows. Whatever the water color, light line is the way to go, with six-pound test being about right."

Locating fish is also a challenge. "With some kinds of fish, you know that you can fish eddies, or current, or pools and catch them," explains Rector. "With white bass, you never know. Sometimes they will be in really fast water out in the middle of the Holston, and at other times, the whole school will be crowded up against the bank in the still water. You have to explore the whole river, but if you find one stripe—the chances are that you have found a bunch."

The spring I went in search of that "one stripe," I arrived on the stream and found that the water temperature had dropped into the upper 50's, and the fish that had been biting earlier had developed lockjaw. No one I talked to that day had landed a fish. Of course, I had plenty of fellow fishermen tell me they had been catching plenty of nice stripes earlier in the week.

Such are the vagaries of the run.

The exact location of the heart of the run typically depends on the level of Holston Reservoir. If the impoundment is up, the fish tend to run further up the river. Generally, however, the best fishing occurs from the old railroad trestle below Alvarado, which is now part of the Virginia Creeper Trail, up to the Alvarado Bridge. Some fish also run up the nearby Middle Fork of the Holston. But, by far, the best action takes place on the South Fork.

To get in on this fishing, from Interstate 81-south take Exit 14 (the first Abingdon Exit) and get on Route 58 East. Near the community of Osceola, turn right onto Route 722, then left onto Route 710 which crosses the South Fork near Alvarado. Anglers can access the river and the white bass run by foot from here along the Virginia Creeper Trail.

According to Bob Wollitz, many people prefer to turn right off Route 710 onto Route 674 and then right again onto Route 664 which leads to a VDGIF boat ramp at Whitaker Hollow. From here you can motor the few miles necessary to the run by boat.

Regardless of how good the run is in any given year, this annual rite of spring is an important part of western Virginia culture. Although there are white bass runs elsewhere in the state, none can match the tradition of this one.

"When the dogwoods and the redbuds start to bloom, everybody just figures it's time to head on down to the Holston,"says Rector. "You may catch a smallmouth bass or a walleye from time to time during the run, but it's the white bass that gets everybody all excited. The annual spawning run is just a real tradition in western Virginia." □

Bruce Ingram is the Virginia editor for Outdoor Life *magazine.*

Soc Clay

The white bass run on the South Fork of the Holston generally begins around April 20 and lasts for around 30 days. Male fish making the run may weigh only half a pound, but females can tip the scales between two and three pounds—trophy fish in anybody's book.

Journal

Exclusive! April 22 Is Kids Fishing Day on GW National Forest

Circle Saturday, April 22 on the calendar, and dig out the kids' fishing rods and reels! On that special Saturday, the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) is sponsoring two free fishing days for kids only at Elkhorn Lake in Augusta County and the Episcopal Boys Home on Dunlap Creek near Covington.

At Elkhorn Lake, the fun begins at 10 a.m. and lasts until 3 p.m. Children 15 and under accompanied by an adult are invited to fish the lake, and need not be carrying any fishing licenses or National Forest stamp on that day. Concessions will be available to keep your energy up for casting into the freshly stocked lake. For directions or more information, contact Terry Slater at GWNF 703/828-2591.

That same Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. the waters will be churning on Dunlap Creek at the Episcopal Boys Home off Highway 60 west of Covington. Kids 6-15 years of age must be accompanied by an adult to fish the stocked trout creek without any licenses or National Forest Stamp. Bring your own rod and reel, your favorite bait, and a lunchbox full of goodies and drinks. For more information and directions, call Ed Haverlack at GWNF 703/962-2214.

Book Reviews

Heron Hill Chronicle, by George Reiger. $19.95 cloth,192 pages. Lyons and Burford 1994.

Reading George Reiger is like getting a reality check from your best friend. You may not like what he says, but he's going to tell it the way he sees it, and that's that. Like the best of friends, George Reiger doesn't pull any punches, and he is never predictable. His honesty alternately startles, amuses, and elates.

In his latest book, Reiger will, no doubt (and sometimes at the same time), both offend and charm some readers with his personal, individual vision of the world. It is a clear, fresh vision, uncluttered by compromise or adherence to the status quo, but tempered with a gentleness born of living long and well and with the eyes wide open.

Reiger tells the tale of his move from New York City to a farm on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He spares the reader nothing, telling his troubles of moving in as outsiders among the "born heres" and presenting his own no-nonsense view of contemporary wildlife management and "conservation." To his credit, Reiger is one of few writers I can name who doesn't tiptoe around such delicate issues as the good sense of trapping, of controlling feral cats, or predators. He eloquently states what he believes, whether it's popular or not.

But, his book is not about shocking people with his courage. Truly, it is just a love letter to a place. He knows all the blemishes and beauty marks of his home, and he simply, truthfully, and honestly wants to tell us about it. Like any doting lover, he may sometimes pull out too many snapshots of the farm for us to look at; we may not want to hear all about the restoration of the homeplace, from kitchen to outhouse. But, that's O.K. He's telling us a story. So, *shhh*, be quiet and listen. You might learn something you won't soon forget.

Ecology and Management of the Mourning Dove, edited by Thomas S. Baskett, Mark W. Sayre, Roy E. Tomlinson, and Ralph E. Mirarchi. Stackpole Books. 1993. 567 pages.

No less than 23 authors teamed up to write this monumental profile of North America's most abundant and widespread gamebird. Presented in a highly readable format, this wealth of information on the biology and management of mourning doves is destined to become a classic reference. Twenty-nine chapters cover topics ranging from life history and population characteristics to hunting techniques and shooting field management. A thorough index allows readers to easily locate information on specific topics. Whether you are a wildlife biologist, sportsman, birdwatcher, or outdoor enthusiast, this book is a must for your natural history library. Available only in hardcover, you can order this book for $44.95 from Stackpole Books, 5067 Ritter Rd., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-6921. Telephone credit card orders can be placed by calling 1-800-732-3669.

Secrets of the Nest: The Family Life of North American Birds, by Joan Dunning. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1994. 198 pp.

Did you ever wonder why some birds build nests high in the tops of trees while others nest on the ground? Or why whip-poor-wills just dump their eggs on the forest floor while eagles spend years constructing nests that can weigh up to two tons? If so, you will enjoy reading this fascinating book examining the evolutionary logic behind why a specific type of nest is right for a certain bird species. According to the author, what started out as an idea for a children's book unexpectedly "grew up" into a book for adults. Well written and beautifully illustrated, this captivating book will appeal to anyone (young or old alike) with a fascination for our natural world. You can order your copy from Houghton Mifflin Company, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, Massachusetts, 02116. Cost is $27.50 (hardcover). □

by Col. William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

Small Boat Hulls and Props Hit Victims in Water

There are about 12 million registered boats in the United States and over 2 million unregistered ones. Of the total 14 million boats, 95% are less than 26 feet in length and account for 80% of the injuries in which people in the water are struck by a boat or its propeller. The majority of those accidents are the result of operator error, making them one of the most preventable of all types of boating accidents.

Operator ignorance, inexperience, incompetence, negligence, intoxication, and other substance abuse are significant contributing factors in boat and propeller strikes. In almost all cases, the victim is in the water—a swimmer, scuba diver, free-diver, fallen water-skier or someone who has fallen overboard .

Passengers moving around in a boat, standing, improperly seated, or in an otherwise precarious position, may be thrown overboard. Other boating activities which cause people to find themselves suddenly underwater are wake-jumping, sharp turns, and maneuvers at high speeds which are dangerously fast for prevailing conditions. Some victims are violently thrown from boats by collisions with submerged or fixed objects or other boats. Others are thrown overboard by sudden acceleration, deceleration, and violent rocking.

Negligent or reckless operation of a vessel endangers lives and property and is prohibited by law. Law enforcement personnel may impose penalties for negligent or reckless operation, and violations involving boat operation while intoxicated can result in criminal penalties.

Boaters should be trained to exercise that degree of care which a reasonable person would demonstrate in order to prevent the endangering of life limb or property of any person. Some examples of negligent or reckless operation are:

- Operating boats in swimming areas.
- Operating boats while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Excessive speed in the vicinity of other boats or in dangerous waters.
- Jumping boat wakes when the boats making the wakes are towing persons on skis, tubes or other items from which towed persons might fall.
- Bowriding or riding on seatbacks, gunwales or transoms.

Below are some safe boating tips to follow which can reduce boating accidents:

- Proper lookouts should be maintained. The greatest single cause of accidents in which people in the water are struck by boats or propellers is operator inattention or carelessness.
- Boat engines must be shut off when passengers are boarding or disembarking.
- Boats should never be started in gear.
- Diminished speed must be used when approaching congested areas and anchorages.
- Operators must know the meaning of regulatory markers and buoys and obey the warnings.
- Boats must avoid marked swimming and diving areas. Familiarity with the meaning of swallowtail blue and white flags and the international orange flags with diagonal white stripes is important. Both mean that there is a diver underwater—stay away.
- Passengers must be properly seated. Some boat operators have started their vessels and put engines in gear while passengers were still swimming or diving.
- When people fall overboard:
  1. The first person who sees the fall should point to the spot where the victim was last seen, keeping the person in sight.
  2. The stern should be turned away from the victim to prevent propeller injury.
  3. Engines should be shut off at least a boat length from the victim.
  4. Throw floating devices to the victim.
  5. Extend lines or poles to the victim so that he or she can be pulled to the vessel and helped out of the water.

The best approach to preventing boat and propeller strikes is to educate boaters, especially boat operators. They must learn the abilities and limitations of their equipment. They must learn and understand the hazards their boats can cause to people in the water. Above all, they must understand the consequences of careless or negligent operation, and how they, as boat operators, can act to prevent accidents. □

Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

Don't Be Afraid to Take A Dip

My camera and I plunged into the freezing waters of the James River. I remained calm. From below the surface I could see the sky reflecting through bits of ice which rimmed dark boulders. The rocks reminded me of the mountains just west of here, rounded peaks looming up from a constantly changing landscape.

Something smacked me in the face and I quickly waved it aside. Sticks and decaying leaves flew by in the strong current.

I began to realize a need to plant myself in one spot and think about what I was going to do. The water was beginning to numb my legs and I didn't know how much longer I would be able to survive the cold.

I lifted my head and looked around. Kneeling in chest high waders, I proceeded to walk on my knees along the shallow river bottom. Where the current was less strenuous, I sat back on my legs and lowered my head below the surface. This looked like a good spot.

A silver flash and I noticed a group of minnows feeding on bright green algae. Slowly I approached, watching carefully for any sign of retreat. The minnows seemed preoccupied with the entrancing movement of the hair-like vegetation. It was like watching a well choreographed dance, the partners bowing in and out with perfect rhythm.

Clutching my camera I maneuvered into position. The minnows looked so beautiful moving in and out of the waving green. "This is going to make a fabulous photograph," I thought as I focused the camera.

Of course, that's when they chose to leave.

Under the circumstances, getting the photograph wasn't the total purpose of my cold-water treasure hunt. I just enjoyed seeing native water critters living their secret lives. From my subsurface perspective, crayfish and smallmouth bass peered from rocky crevices. During warmer summer days, freshwater mussels, aquatic insects, snakes and turtles could hold me enraptured. It was like diving on a coral reef in some distant tropical island. Except this was Virginia, the water was cold and I dry as a bone.

If you want to view wet wildlife in the shallows of Virginia waters, a mask, snorkel and a pair of tennis shoes can provide you with a watery adventure similar to faraway places. If you want to photograph at the same time, there are several options.

You can purchase a hard plastic underwater housing such as those produced by Aqua Vision Systems and Ikelite (around $450). These box-like housings can handle about any manual or autofocus 35mm camera and have interchangeable domes for different lens selections. More expensive plastic or metal alloy housings are available, but these are usually geared toward professionals with expensive equipment or deep dives. These housings can run from $1000-$2500. There are also flexible plastic housings produced to cover everything from your point-and-shoot to the family camcorder. Such housings are manufactured by EWA-Marine and these will cost you between $100 and $250.

Of course, underwater cameras are available and they can be as sophisticated or as simple as you'd like. There are several point-and-shoot underwater cameras, such as Canon's Sure Shot A1, around $200, and Sea & Sea Motor Marines from $250-$350. More expensive models like the Nikonos V are about $600 and these cameras have a variety of interchangeable lenses and flash equipment. But if you really want to be the envy of the underwater scene, take a look at Nikonos RS autofocus SLR. This is the only 35mm SLR underwater camera out there. Of the few lenses available, the 20-35mm zoom len (about $2600) is an especially useful lens on the underwater front. The camera body alone will run you around $2400.

I've found that an inexpensive

vehicle for photographing in shallow water is a 10-gallon glass aquarium. You don't have to get your head wet or own an underwater camera. Simply place your camera in the aquarium and press the lens right up to the glass at whatever side or height suits you. You can even use the glass bottom to shoot through. Depending on your camera, and the size of your noggin, you can photograph all sorts of things with your $10 housing.

Working with an aquarium can be awkward. You will need a lot of patience getting used to shooting with a big glass box over your upside down head. To be on the safe side, try practicing in your home or backyard first.

Once you've practiced, carefully carry your gear to the nearest creek or river. I use a Canon F1 camera with motor drive, various lenses depending on what type of picture I'm looking for and a right angle finder. The right angle finder is a periscope-like object which screws into the viewfinder and enables you to see exactly what your camera sees. Truthfully, it's quite addicting. I find that I can spend all day peering into clumps of vegetation, under logs or rocks without getting wet, slimmed or snake bit. It's great!

Just be *careful*! Whenever you work with glass you must always worry about the possibility of it breaking. Even a gentle bump on a log could ruin an otherwise enjoyable day. Try to be aware of this and work slowly, patiently. If you do have an accident, please be considerate of others who follow in your footsteps and take time to clean up your mess.

This spring, get out into the rivers, lakes or creeks and check out the aquatic critters that make Virginia their home. Grab a camera and don't be afraid to dunk your head into the great unknown. □

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Habitat

by Nancy Hugo

Violets

Thrushes sing to violets, or so I've heard. That should be reason enough for letting them grow in the yard, but here are other reasons.

Violets are an important larval food for butterflies. That's just a fancy way of saying caterpillars eat them. But, as any good butterfly gardener knows, if you're going to have butterflies, you need to provide them more than nectar sources. You need to provide food for their caterpillars. And butterfly caterpillars are finicky. For example, not only do fritillaries (orange butterflies with black markings) require violets as their larval food, some fritillaries require specific species of violets for their larvae.

Violets provide other wildlife services, too. Bees and butterflies sip nectar in the spurred base of the violet's lowest petal. In fact, lines in the violet's face lead them to it. Songbirds and gamebirds eat violet seeds, and wild turkeys eat their tuberous roots. Among the birds most fond of violet seeds are juncos, turkeys, bobwhites, mourning doves, ruffed grouse, and quail.

People eat violets, too. The leaves are reportedly high in vitamins A and C and can be used in salads or cooked as greens. The blossoms can be thrown in salads or candied (brushed with a water and egg white mixture, then sprinkled with fine sugar) and used as cake decorations.

There are over 20 species of violets in Virginia, but the one most people are familiar with is the common blue violet, *Viola papilionacea*. Its five petals are usually a bluish-purple, but they can range in color from reddish-purple to shades of blue and white. The Confederate violet, with its blue markings on white petals appearing blue-grey, is a variation of our common blue violet.

For my money, the most beautiful violet in Virginia woods is the birdsfoot violet. The flat face of some birdsfoot violets is entirely light lilac; others have light lilac lower petals and deep, velvety purple upper petals. Add orange anthers to the center of this "face" and you have a really dramatic little flower. Birdsfoot violets also have unusual, deeply cut leaves that resemble, guess what?—birdsfeet. Look for them in the leaf litter or pine duff of dry woods.

What would spring be without violets? Virginia is blessed with over 20 species of these tiny beauties; photo by Frank Gatewood.

Learning to identify violets isn't easy because the plants hybridize and take various forms depending on when and where they grow, but most everyone can learn the difference between stemmed and stemless violets. Stemless violets are those whose flowers and leaves come up from the ground on single stalks (our common blue violets do this). Stemmed violets have stems from which the flowers and leaves branch. The wild pale violet, *Viola striata*, is a stemmed violet whose heart-shaped leaves and cream-colored flowers branch off from another stem.

In addition to being stemmed or stemless, violets also vary in leaf shape, color, and habits of growth. In addition to the heart-shaped leaves of our common blue violets and the deeply cleft leaves of the birdsfoot violets, violets can have lobed leaves, long oblong leaves like primroses, lance-shaped leaves, and leaves of other shapes. They range in color from white to blue, purple, reddish, and even yellow.

Some violets increase by runners, some form large clumps and others form stolons (underground stems) that send up new growth near the parent plant. Strange as it seems, the most unusual way for a violet to reproduce is the way most flowers do—by producing an open flower that goes to seed. Instead, many violets form flowers that never open but fertilize themselves in bud. In most species these "cleistogamous flowers" are short, low buds that form half-buried in the soil, then become more erect as they ripen, open, and release their seeds.

It's these seeds and the zillions of offspring they produce that turn many gardeners against violets, but if it's the way they leap into the lawn that bothers you, relax. Violets may be the fescue of the future. Researchers all over the country are experimenting with seed mixes that go by names like EcoLawn which are designed to create low maintenance lawns with little or no fertilizer or water. One of the ingredients in these seed mixes is creeping violets!

But you don't need to wait for an EcoLawn mix to have violets in your lawn: just stop spreading the broadleaved weed killers that may be wiping out the violets you already have. A thrush will thank you for it. □

Recipes

By Joan Cone

Striped Bass–Fun To Catch And Cook

MENU

Wonton Chips
Striped Bass Steaks Florentine
Lemon Potato Wedges
Tomato, Basil, Mozzarella Salad
Deep-Dish Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie

Wonton Chips

¼ cup sesame seeds
1 package (12 ounces) Won Ton Wrappers Salt to taste

Preheat oven to 400°. Spray 2 baking sheets with nonstick cooking spray. Heat a small, heavy, dry skillet over medium-high heat. Add sesame seeds and cook, stirring constantly, or shaking the pan for 2 to 3 minutes until lightly browned and fragrant. Let cool.

Spread a clean dish towel on the counter. Fill a medium-size bowl with cold water. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add 4 wonton wrappers, one at a time. After about 20 seconds or when the skins look like cooked noodles, remove them with a slotted spoon and immerse in the bowl of cold water. Immediately arrange in a single layer on the towel to drain.

When you have enough wonton wrappers to fill a baking sheet, arrange them in a single layer on a prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle with sesame seeds. Season with salt. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until golden and crisp. Remove to a rack to cool. Repeat procedure with remaining wrappers. Store in a closed container for up to several weeks or in a freezer up to 2 months. Makes about 40 chips.

Striped Bass Steaks Florentine

2 packages (10 ounces each) frozen, chopped spinach, thawed
½ teaspoon instant minced onion
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon nutmeg
4 striped bass steaks (4 ounces each)
1 tablespoon lemon juice
¼ cup butter

Place a large size (14 x 20-inch) Oven Cooking Bag in a 2-inch deep roasting pan. Remove excess moisture from spinach. Combine spinach, onion, salt and nutmeg; place in bag, distributing evenly. Arrange fish steaks on spinach bed. Sprinkle with lemon juice and dot with butter. Close bag with twist tie and make 6, ½-inch slits in top of bag. Place in a preheated 350° oven and bake for 35 to 40 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Serves 4.

Lemon Potato Wedges

1½ pounds potatoes (about 4 medium) unpeeled, cut lengthwise in 6 wedges each
Juice of 1 lemon (3 tablespoons)
¼ cup sliced green onions
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
Grated peel of ½ lemon
½ teaspoon dried dill weed

In a covered non-stick skillet, cook potatoes in gently boiling water with 2 tablespoons lemon juice for 17 to 20 minutes or until tender (do not overcook); drain well. In same skillet, sauté green onions in margarine with lemon peel and dill. Add potatoes and remaining 1 tablespoon lemon juice; heat. Makes 4 servings.

Tomato, Basil, Mozzarella Salad

1 bag (10 ounces) Italian blend salad mix
4 medium tomatoes, sliced
4 ounces mozzarella cheese, sliced, cut in strips
1 small red onion, thinly sliced, optional
8 black olives
Freshly ground black pepper

Italian Vinaigrette:

¼ cup olive oil
3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon prepared mustard
⅛ teaspoon salt

Whisk together all ingredients.

Toss salad mix with 3 tablespoons Italian Vinaigrette. Divide salad on four plates. Arrange tomato, mozzarella and onion slices over salad. Drizzle with additional dressing. Garnish with olives. Sprinkle with pepper. Serves 4.

Deep-Dish Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie

⅓ cup flour
1⅛ cups sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
Pinch of salt
3 cups small strawberries, hulled
2 cups trimmed and ½-inch sliced rhubarb
2 tablespoons butter or margarine, cut into bits
Crust for a deep-dish pie cover

Combine the flour, sugar, cinnamon, allspice, cloves and salt in a large mixing bowl. Add the strawberries and rhubarb, toss well and let stand for 1 minute. Spoon the filling into a deep 9-inch pie pan or any other deep-dish ovenproof vessel, mounding the filling slightly toward the center. Dot with butter, cover with the round of dough, seal and crimp the edges. Cut several steam vents, using a sharp paring knife. Bake in a preheated 425° oven for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350° and continue baking for about 35 to 40 minutes longer or until pastry is golden. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes 8 servings. □